THE BEAVTY OF GODLY GOVERNMENT IN A GHVRCH REFORMED:

OR A

Platforme of Government

Consonant to the Word of Truth, and the purest reformed CHVRCHES.

Shewing also,

The great good that comes thereby, the great evils that it freeth us from.

WITH

The two maine Objections answered, which are Objected by some of the Laitie, and some of the Clergie.

Whereunto is added,

A short Parralell between the *Presbyterian* and *Prelatick* Government.

Published for such as are not well acquainted with it.

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THE BEAVTY OF CHRISTS Government in a Church reformed.

In a Parish

HEre it must begin, according to the order in holy Writ; the first Churches being Parochiall: speciall care must be had, that parishes have in them the ordinances of Christ.

That there be an able Pastor, set over the people in every Congregation, for teaching and ruling them.

That there be with him assistants in governing, called Elders, with us Churchwardens, which are in their roome.

These must be men of the best quality among them, men of understanding, lovers of Religion, and of a godly, honest, and peaceable conversation.

They are to be chosen with the peoples consent, and admitted solemnly with

prayer, in the face of the whole Congregation, and an exhortation faithfully to discharge their duties, which they must promise to performe, God assisting them.

The number to be moe or fewer, as the parish is greater or lesser.

The meeting of these to be weekely, if it may be, at a set time and place; for conveniency, in the Church, after divine service is ended in the afternoone, or in the week-day when there is a sermon.

The end thereof.

To looke to all the parishioners concerning their religion and exercise thereof, publikely and privately, to see to their honest behaviour, and peaceable demeanour one towards another, at home and abroad.

To receive complaints against any delinquents, and to proceed against them to admonition, to suspension from the holy Communion, according to the quality of the offence, and as the offender shal deserve without partiality. To excommunicate any is very rare, and not without the wise advice of the Presbytery.

Lastly, the manner of proceeding, to be after the rule of Gods word, and according to the godly Ecclesiasticall Lawes prescribed

ſcribed them to follow, agreeable to the Word.

To this meeting come the Over-ſeers of the poore, called Deacons: They are to be choſen as the Elders are, men of honeſty, faithfull and godly.

Their office is to take care of the poore, faithfully to diſtribute the collections, and wiſely, according to every ones neceſſity. To viſit the ſick, and to be able to examine them in the grounds of Religion, inſtructing the ignorant, and comforting them that want conſolation; as elſewhere they doe.

Motives to imbrace this Parochiall government, which Epiſcopall government keepes us from.

From the good which comes thereby.

1. Hereby Religion and vertue with much care, put in practice: peace and unity alſo will be preferred.

2 Hereby will religious perſons, religious meetings, and pious exercises be had in eſteeme, and the vertuous regarded; who will be watchfull one over another, being knit together in an holy communion, much wish us wanting.

3 Hereby will the vicious, the prophane

and ſcandalous be ſuppreſſed; ſinne will not be ſuffered to reigne, nor be ſo rife as with us it is.

4 Hereby, through weekly meeting to ſuppreſſe vice, and to maintaine vertue, the Paſtors themſelves, the Elders and Deacons ſhall become better acquainted with the wayes of vertue, and grow more in hatred with vice: know alſo better the rule of ordering of Chriſts people, wiſely and religiouſly, whereby his glory may more ſhine among them, and they made happy inſtruments thereof.

II. From the great evils which we are freed from: but Epiſcopacy keepes us under.

1 Hereby ſhall all be freed from the heavie yoake, and authority of their Eccleſiaſticall Courts, and their corruptions, which God and men of all ſorts cry out againſt.

2 From the great expences of money, in journying ſometimes many miles, in lying there at coſt, and diſburſing the charges impoſed, and called for by the Court; beſides often appearing, long delayes, and loſſe of much time.

3 From the wicked and inforcing oath *ex officio*; and from the many thouſands of oathes which Church-wardens take; and

and from the oath of purgation inforced upon many to cleare themselves of a ſuſpected crime: in taking of which oathes, many forſweare themſelves, and procure the Lords curſe againſt them, and the whole Land.

To theſe Motives, adde:

1 That ſuch a government in a Parochiall Church of Chriſt, is approved by our neighbour Kingdome with good ſucceſſe, to the honour of Chriſt, and the peoples reformation.

2 That in the Apoſtles dayes were firſt founded parochiall Churches, and in them the Elders and Deacons ordained, and all Chriſts ordinances exerciſed in them; and therefore to be admitted of us.

3 That the robbing of parochiall Congregations of theſe holy ordinances, is the very ground of their ſpirituall miſery; from which, if they ſeeke not to be freed, they are moſt unhappy, and can never attaine to that ſpirituall condition which is ſo hartily wiſhed for, and deſired, for their ſoules ſafety.

Objections anſwered.

Some of the Laitie pleaſe to ſay, that this is to make every Miniſter a pope in his pariſh.

Anſwer

Answer.

That a Pastor is to bee obeyed of his people, will not be denied, for the word commands it, *Heb.* 13. 7. 17. But to Lord it over Gods heritage he may not, 1 *Pet.* 5. 3. Nor doth this make him a Pope in his Parish, for the Elders are joyned with him in government, so as without them hee can doe nothing; hee is also subject to the Presbytery, and must bee kept within his limits, prescribed him.

Some of the Clergy object, and say that these Elders doe overtop their Ministers and make them their vassalls.

Answer. 1.

One of these objections must be false, if not both, for they oppose one another.

2. Such Minister as thus object may be satisfied by the practise of the Elders, among whom this government is exercised. Doe they ever heare any of the faithfull Ministers make such a complaint against their Elders?

3. These Elders are but Assistants to their pastor and only second them, not going before them in the session, the Pastor is moderator in the whole action beginning with prayer and so ends it; when hee speakes

ſpeakes to them, they ſhew him very reverend reſpect. Yea the greateſt Noblemen in the land, in Church-meetings, doe not over-ſway the meaneſt and pooreſt Miniſter, for if he doe hee ſhall bee called to an account before the generall aſſembly, where if hee appeare in any ill cauſe, hee will bee made more aſhamed, then before any judicature in the kingdome.

4. Why ſhould any bee offended at thoſe Elders, and ſo conceit amiſſe againſt them, when wee beare the commanding power of lay Chancellors, lay Commiſſaries, with their Regiſters, who rule maſterly over us, making us to be unconſcionably ſlaviſh executioners of their often unjuſt commands.

Laſtly, conſider that from hence juſt appeales may bee made to the Presbytery.

II. *In every diviſion or circuit ſuteable to our Deanry.*

That there be a claſſicall meeting called elſewhere a Presbytery. This conſiſts of all the Miniſters of Pariſhes within the Deanry, or ſuch a circuit thereof as may conveniently meet, to which are ſent by conſent out of every Pariſh one of their Elders. This meeting is to be once a fort-

night. In this from among the Paſtors muſt the graveſt, the wiſeſt, the beſt eſteemed for life and godlineſſe be choſen moderator, for the time of the ſitting and meeting. Hee is to beginne with prayer and end ſo after a Pſalme and a Sermon; here Miniſters are to ſhew their gifts, and how they profit, and goe on in the Miniſtry. And ſuch as intend the Miniſtery are here to be tryed, and if fit, to be ordained, if a place bee void: theſe looke into parochial Seſſions, within their circuit, that Paſtors, Elders, and people behave themſelves as they ought: Here the power of juriſdiction is uſed, the doctrine and lives of Miniſters are enquired into, and according as they finde, they encourage the faithfull diſpenſers againſt others, they proceed to admonition, ſuſpenſion, and deprivation, as they ſhall ſee juſt cauſe ſo to doe. All other ſorts of perſons of what quality ſoever, which ſhall be diſobedient to their owne Paſtors and Elders, proceeding in their parochiall meetings lawfully, are with great authority cenſured.

By this wee ſee how the parochiall govenement is upheld, and yet kept within bounds, Chriſts Doctrine and worſhip kept pure, good Miniſters honoured, and the reſt eitheir reformed, or caſt out.

III. In

III. *In every County or ſhire.*

In this muſt be a Synod, called elſewhere Provinciall.

It conſiſts of the whole Presbyteries within that Shire, or Province, with one Elder from every Pariſh, men of ranke and quality, Gentlemen, Knights and Barons, for ſuch in ſome places are Elders. The meeting to be every halfe yeare, as our Archdeacons viſitations be.

Here being aſſembled, they beginne with praying and preaching, the Sermon being made by the former Moderatour; which ended, a new Moderatour is then choſen, or the ſame againe confirmed.

Theſe meete not to call for Synodals, or paſchall rents, nor to gather procurations, nor to ſweare Church-wardens, to make preſentments, for theſe aſſemblies ſit not for to gather monies; but this Synod meeteth to make enquiry by the records of every Presbyterie into the governing of all the Presbyteries, and all the Churches under them, and to rectifie what is amiſſe therein.

To ſupply what is wanting, and to cenſure any for faults, crimes & offences committed.

All matters with great diligence, and ſpeed, are here ſo to be expedited, as the time may not bee long, nor the ſtaying to become chargeable and burthenſome, but that the

Paſtors and Elders may returne home in good time, before the Lords day.

Can we be ſo happy as to enjoy ſuch Synods, wee ſhall be rid of the vaine and very chargeable viſitations of Archdeacons, where Miniſters and people waſtefully lay out yearly ſome thouſands of pounds throughout the whole land.

IV. *In one whole nation.*

This is the generall aſſembly of the nation, or nationall meeting.

It conſiſts of Paſtors and Elders from every Presbytery, to which have come ſometime the Kings Majeſty, or a Commiſſioner for him; as alſo likewiſe the religious and learned Nobles of the land.

This meeting is ellewhere once a yeare, but with us it may fitly be every Parliament time, now appointed to be every third year.

The firſt day of this aſſembly is a day of ſolemne humiliation to prepare them to ſo great and holy a worke, at the end whereof a Miniſter is choſen by the voices of all to be Preſident and Moderator in that aſſembly: who prayeth at every ſitting downe, and when they riſe up for a bleſſing of God upon them.

The power of this is very great; it upholdeth the

the authority of the other assemblies, maketh lawes Ecclesiasticall agreeing to holy Scripture, for the wel-ordering of all the Churches in spirituall matters, but never intermedleth in matters civill belonging to the Magistrates, either in judging, or inflicting pecuniary, or corporall punishment.

Its now among us a great question, Whether is better, the Presbyterian government in Scotland, or the Prelatian government in England, for the Churches spirituall welfare?

To judge aright herein, these considerations are propounded to the wisedome of the wise and religious, who would lay aside all partiality in this cause of God:

1 Whether of them hath the best proofe, either for the whole, or for the part, from holy Scripture: and so Gods approbation?

2 Which is agreeing most to all the reformed Churches, with which we agree in Doctrine, and separation from the Church of Rome?

3 Whether of these is most like the government of the Church of Rome, under the Pope, that Antichrist; and aptest to let in, and fittest to keepe out the Ceremonies, the superstition, and the idolatry of that whore of Rome?

4 Whether of them doth tend more to godlinesse then greatnesse?

5 Whether of them is the moſt profitable to advance the powerfull practice of religion and vertue, and the ſuppreſſion of vice, that God may receive glory?

For the better evidencing hereof, let them be compared in theſe few things together.

The Presbyterian.

I. This hath for the teaching Elders, very certaine teſtimony from Scripture, *Tit.* 1.5. and ſtrong probability for ruling Elders, 1 *Tim.* 5.17 *Rom.* 12.8. 1 *Cor.* 12. 28. And therefore being allowed of God, is fitteſt to advance the power of godlineſſe.

II. This ſets up in every pariſh a Seſſion, for the religious ordering thereof.

III. The order of this is framed ſo, as the parts thereof is ſubordinate one to another; as the Seſſion to the Presbytery; this, to the Provinciall Synod, and this to the Nationall, to further godlineſſe.

The Prelatian.

This hath no probabilitie, much leſſe any certainty of Scripture for Archbiſhops, Dioceſan Biſhops, Deanes, Archdeacons; for their lay Chauncellours, lay Commiſſaries: and therefore being altogether of man, is not ſo fit, as we finde by experience, to advance the power of godlineſſe.

This deprives wholly parochiall aſſemblies of ſuch an helpe, for their ſpirituall good, ſubjecting them ſlaviſhly to their moſt corrupt courts.

This is ſo framed as an overtopping power of ſome, may ſway over all as they liſt, without any ſuch ſubordination, to uphold onely their greatneſſe; as their practiſe proclaime before the world.

IV. This

IV. This alloweth nothing in and about Gods publike worſhip, but what is warrantable by Scripture.

This bringeth in, and approveth of many deviſes of men, corrupting Gods worſhip without warrant of Scripture.

V. This ordaineth no Miniſters for money, nor any but ſuch as be apt to teach; nor doth it permit any, which are not ſuch, and do performe their Miniſtery faithfully.

This ordaineth for money, and many unapt to teach, yea, and permits thouſands of dumbe Miniſters, which cannot teach, and lazie Miniſters which will not preach, but either ſeldome or never.

VI. This alloweth no pluraliſts, nor any Nonreſidents, nor foule and ſcandalous Miniſters.

This alloweth many hundreds of Pluraliſts and Nonreſidents, and not a few of evill life; unſufferable in Chriſts Church.

VII. This upholdeth preaching, countenanceth diligent preachers, and encourageth them.

This taketh not much care for preaching, never calleth any to account for negligent preaching: but ſome Prelates ſuppreſſe it, and are vexatious to many faithfull Miniſters.

VIII. This ſuffers, without jealouſie, the people to meet together, to talke and conferre about what they have heard, and to read good books, to ſing Pſalms, and to pray together.

This is ſo jealous, as people are reſtrained from ſuch meetings, being held Conventicles for which they are called to their courts and cenſured.

IX. This

IX. This carefully prevents errours, and hereſies, Papiſts, and papiſtry, and whatſoever may be troubleſome to the Church.

This looketh to nothing but conformity to humane inventions, ſuffering falſe doctrines to be broached, Arminianiſme, Socinianiſm, Popery, & popiſhly affected to increaſe, ſo they conforme men to their ceremonies.

If all theſe conſiderations (to which more may be added) be ſeriouſly pondered, it may eaſily be judged whether government is the more pleaſing to God, and more profitable to his people for ſpirituall life and ſalvation.

FINIS.